

16 of 21 DOCUMENTS

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HEADLINE: Report flagged BMO loss; \$450M trading fiasco; CEO Downe acted on April findings from Deloitte

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BODY:

The decision by Bill Downe, Bank of Montreal's new chief executive, to act decisively on its \$350- million to \$450-million naturalgas trading blunder was the result of a tough report from forensic auditors Deloitte and Touche LLP into the activity of BMO's former star commodities trader, David Lee, it emerged yesterday.

BMO engaged Deloitte in early February and received the final report in late April.

Deloitte found there had been "serious mismarking of the book of natural-gas options," said a source familiar with the report.

The forensic auditors indicated they had "never seen such a wide discrepancy in terms of pricing" between the values marked in BMO's portfolio of natural-gas options and their market value, the source said.

The Deloitte report also indicated that some of the prices used in BMO's mismarked book of trades were provided by Valhalla, N.Y.-based brokerage Optionable Inc., the source said.

Based on the findings of the report, Mr. Downe went public with the losses. The CEO, who only took the reins at BMO in March, announced the losses on April 27 and spoke to banking analysts on a conference call the same day.

Mr. Downe said the bank has refined its method of estimating the value of its book and also blamed the losses on a drying up of liquidity and flattening out of natural gas prices.

BMO has also confirmed that Mr. Lee, the man at the centre of the money-losing trades, is on a leave of absence, along with Bob Moore, the bank's executive head of commodity products. On Tuesday, BMO also said it has suspended its business relationship with Optionable.

Shares of the brokerage, which was dependent on Mr. Lee for as much as 30% of its revenue, have tumbled 60% since BMO announced the trading losses.

Sources close to Mr. Lee and Optionable say the BMO trader, widely regarded as the biggest natural-gas options trader in the market, had a close personal relationship with the senior management of Optionable, including Kevin Cassidy, the chief executive.

Meanwhile, the brokerage's new chairman, Albert Helmig, dismissed concerns about the loss of its biggest customer on Tuesday. "In the extreme scenario, that they go away tomorrow, someone else comes in and fills BMO's place," Mr. Helmig said.

Optionable's stock price has soared from \$1.34 six months ago to as high as \$8.63 in February this year, when it was revealed the New York Mercantile Exchange (Nymex) -- one of the foremost commodities exchanges in the world -- had bought a 19% stake in the company.

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However, there was more bad news for Optionable yesterday after the company filed a document with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission indicating that its options trading platform, known as OPEX, is under threat from the Nymex's own electronic trading platform.

"The Company is unable to quantify the impact of this potential competition on its business, including its future results of operations and financial condition," the Optionable statement said.

Mr. Helmig, a former vicechairman of Nymex, took over as Optionable's chairman last week following the resignation of Mark Nordlicht.

Mr. Nordlicht said his resignation was not linked to BMO's trading losses. Both Mr. Helmig and Mr. Nordlicht are also on the board of directors of Platinum Energy Resources Inc. an oiland- gas business that uses hedge financing to profit from energy price volatility.

BMO is expected to provide further details concerning the trading losses on May 23, when it announces its results for the second quarter of 2007. The bank has said "a full external review" of the losses is ongoing.

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BANK OF MONTREAL

Ticker BMO/TSX

Close \$67.91, down 20¢

Volume 2,101,851

Avg. 6-month vol. 1,315,031

Rank in FP500 19

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